



Mere Jolly the sun travels West,
The earth warming beneath,
How's our sport scuttling right in his
flow'rs and in the grass,
As a bud in the sheath.

For the tender and unquiet woman
The Spring drawing on,
Kindness in the eye, chides
the reason,
And silvers the moon.

Leap high, jealous Noll; trip it out
Pretty Moll and forget
In employment of blooms and feet
Your love's flapping feet.



In Spain, they are courtiers, in
They are wits to a man;
But England is famed for her dance
O, we dance when we can.

We seek out the cherry-tree shade
To sit under the tree,
There the pipe and the tabor are
played:
O the merry mouthed pipe!

For Summer gives practice again
To the pipe and the tabor,
That we learn against manners of
Spain
German frost and French feet.

Drawn by Kenneth Bath.



We dance in the Spring for daisies,
In the Summer for pride,
In Autumn for praise; the mild Jere
Of the horrid barns wide.

When the fat sheep is carried, now
Noll carries an apple in his
count
For his Moll to stare
Then back to the dance marching go
This most fortunate pair.



Here gambol the Lord of Miraval,
From the heavy load thumpings he
got
From the hoary foad thumpings he
got
From the sword of the Saint.

They dance dithy side from the pot,
How he tips! He is first
From the hoary foad thumpings he
got
From the sword of the Saint.

Yes, we dance that should Christmas
prolog
For a dawn night's merr
He would not spare the rafters with
Nor with leaping, the floor.

Drawn by Robert Green.

The Ur-Text to ‘The Country Dance’: An Unrecorded Poem

Carl Hahn and Michael Joseph

Abstract: This note discusses an unrecorded poem, an antecedent of ‘The Country Dance’, and touches on one of its characteristics, suggesting that elements in the poem draw attention to the later poem’s implicit eroticism. The note also comments on Graves’s selective interpretation of the illustration in drawing out a larger theme.

Keywords: word and image, poetry, dance

In its December 1926 issue, *Pears Annual* published an untitled poem by Robert Graves composed in four sections to four colour illustrations signed Kennedy North.¹ The poems and pictures evoked the seasons in terms of dance.² In the spring, Pretty Moll can forget her ‘fidgeting fret’ in the ‘employment of elbows and feet’. ‘Summer gives practice again | To the art we love best’; in Autumn, dancing is done for praise, and at Christmas, the dragon gulps ale and would gladly prolong leaping ‘for a dozen nights more’. The seasons seem to correspond to the stages of maturation: in adolescence, dancing sublimates one’s nervous energy; in early middle-age, dancing has been raised to an art; in late middle-age, one’s dance artistry might win admiration; and in old age, dancing has devolved into carefree leaping.

Graves published a shorter version of the poem ‘The Country Dance’ six months later in *Poems 1914-1926*, consisting of the first of the four sections slightly revised with a revised quatrain from the second section. No illustration appears with the poem but a trace of the original intent lingers there as a headnote, ‘Verses for a Picture’. ‘The Country Dance’ continued in Graves’s canon until

1961, making its last appearance during his lifetime in *Collected Poems* (1961).³

Possibly of interest, ‘The Country Dance’ changes ‘In employment of elbows and feet | your love’s fidgeting fret’ (‘Spring’), to ‘By employment of elbows and feet | The green sickness of love’. The Green Sickness (Hypochromic anaemia) was associated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with girls approaching puberty, and slender women who some believe may have been indulging in a fashionable lassitude. Graves equates the Green Sickness with the disabling melancholy of pubescent yearning, an idea prompted perhaps by the original illustration in which gaily dressed lovers sit beneath a tree while two cupids play what is probably stirring music. One cupid seems even to be tossing them a come-hither glance over his shoulder. Behind the lovers, almost off-stage (in Latin, *ob-scena*) we see the tree-shape echoed in a Maypole dance whose ancient origins are said by some (Hobbes and Freud among them) to involve priapic symbolism, and sacred trees.⁴

It’s possible that Graves intended to emphasise the erotic by titling the poem ‘The Country Dance’, intending an allusion to Shakespeare’s ‘country matters’. We encounter the idea of green spring and young lust in ‘The White Goddess’ written twenty years later, in a couplet relating to poetic inspiration: ‘Green sap in the young wood astir | Will celebrate the Mountain Mother | And every songbird shout a while for her’. The cupids in the original illustration might even suggest songbirds.

The illustrator better known as Stanley North (he adopted “Kennedy” after his marriage to Helen Kennedy), had an interest in folk dancing as contemporary art, and earlier published a book on English folk dancing (1921). According to Sanford Schwartz, North was a colourful and charming character. ‘He liked to take charge of people’s lives and trading on fabricated family connections; he was a bit of a charlatan’.

The inspiration for Graves to write ‘verses for a picture’ probably came from William Nicholson, Graves’s father-in-law. North was a family friend of sorts to William and Edith Nicholson and had written the ‘first significant publication on Nicholson’ in 1923 in

the *Contemporary British Artists* series. (Sanford Schwartz, *William Nicholson*. London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2004).

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NOTES

¹ Carl Hahn's catalogue number: C247.1 [*The Country Dance] *Pears' Annual*, 44-45.

² For additional discussion of Graves's composing poems for pictures, see Paul O'Prey's article in this issue: 'Robert Graves's Favourite Poem? The One that Saved his Life' (53-60).

³ See Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems*, 3 vols, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), I, pp. 307, 416.

⁴ One recalls Cleland's references to maypoles for example: 'and now, disengag'd from the shirt, I saw, with wonder and surprise, what? not the play-thing of a boy, not the weapon of a man, but a maypole of so enormous a standard, that had proportions been observ'd, it must have belong'd to a young giant'. John Cleland, *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (New York: HarperPerrenial, 2013), p. 167.